

Thesis Development and Supporting Argument

When working on your thesis, it is important to go back to your essay question and to spend time considering its wording. The better you understand and break down the essay question, the easier it will be for you to come up with a thesis.

Specific vs. General Essay Questions: University of Birmingham Examples

Some essay questions have a narrow focus:

“To what extent can it be argued that Byron and Keats are second generation Romantic poets?”

While others may be quite broad:

“Evaluate the effect of landscape on the expansion of the town.”

The first example says specifically the poets to write on and how. The second question is broader and doesn't state which features of landscape or which town to focus on. If the question is broad, you need to narrow it! Both the examples above are broad! **You** need to choose a part of the topic to focus on, and **you** have to narrow down the essay question to accomplish that.

***Writing Tip: It is better to write a lot about a little, versus writing a little about everything.**

How to Narrow Down a Broad or General Essay Question

- Choose 1 or 2 key aspects about the topic, and try to build your argument from that instead of trying to cover everything that falls under that topic.
- From there, decide on the aspect/point you want to argue.

***To do this, you need to understand your essay question first!**

Ways to Narrow Parts of the Essay Question:

- Directive or Task Words- tell you what to do (*discuss, to what extent, argue, etc.*)
- Subject Matter- what you will write about
- Limiting Words- words in the question that may narrow or alter how you approach your subject matter

Example Essay Question: To what extent can the novel *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith be read differently in light of the 9/11 terrorist attack?

To what extent can the novel *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith be read differently in light of the 9/11 terrorist attack?

Task words: you will need to explore both sides of the topic to reach a decision.

This is the subject matter.

Limiting phrase: indicates you will not write about everything you know about *White Teeth* or 9/11. You will focus on whether or not the terrorist attack alters the reading of the novel.

You will need to focus on this novel.

You need to write about this event in relation to the novel.

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Thesis Development and Supporting Argument cont'd

How to Get Started on Your Thesis

Once you have broken down your essay question and understand it:

- Identify and make sure you understand your topic selection.
- Start to jot down your ideas and the research you think will be needed for your topic.

If you are stuck and can't come up with a thesis, try to answer the essay question in one-word. From there:

- expand the one-word answer into a sentence that explains your reason for answering that way;
- from there, you have a working thesis!

After crafting your working thesis, remember:

- 1) You have to relate your thesis to the ideas discussed in your class!
- 2) The assignment type and question (ex. research paper vs. persuasive paper) will influence how you craft your thesis and format your supporting argument.
- 3) To ask yourself, "why is my topic important" and "so what?" If you can't answer those questions, your thesis is too broad and still needs to be narrowed.
- 4) The rest of your paper has to support your thesis! Do not provide evidence if you cannot relate it to your thesis!

Supporting Argument

Once you have a working, or draft, thesis then you can go on to your research. Remember:

- The content of your research usually is stated in the essay question (ex. novel, time period, etc.).
- After your evidence, you have to explain how it supports or relates to your thesis! You can't put a whole bunch of research in one paragraph and expect that alone to back up your thesis. Your evidence is supplementary; it will not prove your thesis if you do not explain how it does.
 - Think of the University of Hull's body paragraph acronyms: TEA (Topic, Evidence, Analysis), PEE (Point, Evidence, Explanation), or WEED (What is the topic? Evidence, Explanation, Did I relate it to my thesis?)

***Planning hint: after you have your working thesis, write out the topic sentences for your main body paragraphs. That will show you if your essay supports your thesis or not.**

Need help improving your academic writing skills? Contact the Writing Specialist for support:

Online: <http://www.mhc.ab.ca/Services/AcademicSupport/WritingSupport>

or at the Student Success Centre located in the

Vera Bracken Library.